



Tiverton site wins historic district designation

The Osborn-Bennett Historic District sits on the edge of North Tiverton, just north of on- and off-ramps to Route 24.

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TIVERTON -- A cluster of 18th and 19th century houses and outbuildings on Main Road just north of Route 24 has been designated the Osborn-Bennett Historic District and added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The listing by the National Park Service grew out of a study of the environmental impact of the planned replacement for the Sakonnet River Bridge between Portsmouth and Tiverton.

Virginia Adams of the Public Archaeological Laboratory, a private firm that drew up the application, said both the federal Environmental Policy Act and the National Historical Preservation Act required the state to evaluate nearby cultural resources as part of the environmental impact of the new bridge.

The historic district, a pocket of four houses, nine associated outbuildings or ruins and a cemetery surrounded by open fields and stone walls, epitomizes the rural heritage of Tiverton.

It sits on the edge of the suburban sprawl of North Tiverton and just north of on- and off-ramps to Route 24, which stand to undergo changes as part of the bridge construction, Adams said.

She said her firm worked under contract to the bridge engineers, Commonwealth Engineers & Consultants.

The designation of the Osborn-Bennett Historic District was announced by Frederick C. Williamson, chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission.

The commission's executive director, Edward F. Sanderson, called it a "remarkable survivor from Tiverton's early rural character two centuries ago."

According to a history compiled by the commission, the Osborn-Bennett complex began in 1790 with a Federal-style house at 1168 Main Rd. built by Thomas Osborn, a farmer.

Osborn, who was about 24 years old at the time, was attracted to the site by the relatively flat arable land and the convenience of Main Road, which had been laid out seven years earlier as a direct route between Tiverton Four Corners to the south and Fall River to the north.

Across the road from the original Osborn homestead, Edward Bennett purchased land and constructed a one-and-one-half-story Cape about 1822.

Two other houses, in the Italianate style, date from 1845. Featuring elaborate wraparound porches, tall narrow windows and decorative wood brackets at the eaves, they were built by Judge Joseph Osborn.

Osborn, who was born in 1803 and died in 1883, had a distinguished career as a farmer, a livestock trader, an investor in Fall River's cotton mills, and a banker. He also served as a judge, a state representative, and Tiverton's treasurer for 44 years.

Joseph Osborn's two houses remained in the family until the second half of the 20th century, but the original Osborn house has never been relinquished by the Osborns.

Today it is owned by Henry Clay Osborn IV and Jason W. Osborn, both great-great-great-grandsons of Thomas Osborn, who died in 1833 and is buried in what is now the Osborn Family Cemetery, a burial ground with about 35 grave markers southeast of the original house.

The cemetery, bordered by stone walls and an iron gate, was conveyed to the town in 1883 and is in active use today.

Properties listed on the National Register of Historic places receive special consideration during the planning of federally assisted projects like the new bridge. Property owners are eligible for federal and state tax benefits for historic rehabilitation. They are free to maintain, manage or dispose of the property as they choose, according to the Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, which is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island's nomination to the National Register.

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